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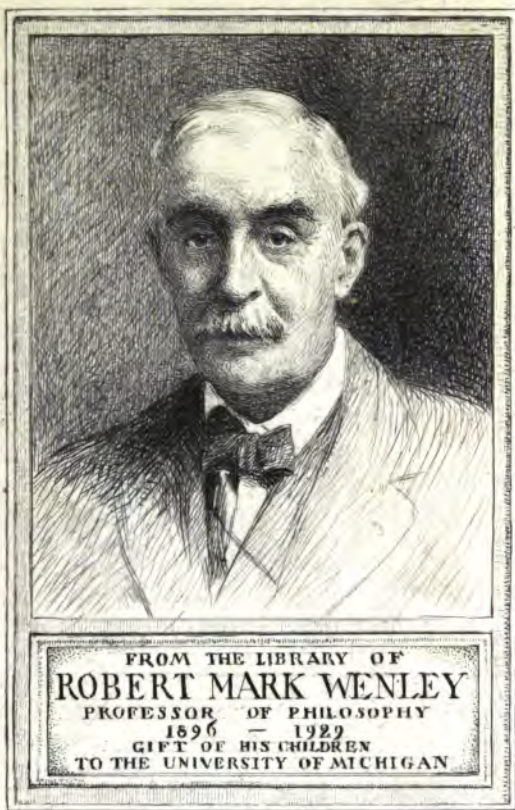
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## JESUS AND MODERN THOUGHT



# Jesus and Modern Thought

DISCOURSES

ON

The Humanity of Jesus

AND

The Love we bear to Jesus

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LONDON

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## THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

### I.

OF the two doctrines, one of which maintains that Jesus Christ is God, and the other that he was a man like to ourselves, we hold here the latter. The first predicates the miraculous. It is not according to reason that the absolute God and a man who lived and died as we live and die, should form one person, and when we hear of it, we say—'If this be true, it is unique in experience; it never occurred before in Man's history. It is not likely to ever occur again.' This is indeed the very thing that the orthodox declare. This traverses, they say, all experience, and it was needful for our salvation that it should do this. Man is naturally sinful, the Redeemer must be sinless; he must be different in kind from man. Jesus

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could not then come into the world as other men come, or leave it as other men do. At the points of his birth and his resurrection he is not as we are. Being himself miraculous, all that belongs to him is also miraculous.

Nevertheless, we are also told by the Churches that 'his human nature was at one with ours, and that he was at all points tempted like as we are.' This preservation of ordinary Humanity alongside of complete Divinity seems a greater miracle even than the Incarnation, and the attempt to explain how this could be, has employed and strained the subtlest intelligences for many centuries. 'Vanity of vanities,' we cry, as we read the infinite labour wasted on this question. Faith, brought to the rescue, may accept the doctrine, but the moment reason takes the hand of faith and both look at it, it seems as if we caught no sight of a real thing. 'He was not then,' we say, 'really at one with us at all. His personality must differ radically from ours. The temptations he suffered seem fictitious, if he could not sin; if there were no struggle of the will against wrong—and there could not be if he were God—he cannot have been truly like a man.'

This and kindred questions have always arisen, and the result has been, both in and outside the Church, that the life and death of Jesus have become subjects of such complex metaphysical discussions—as to how he could suffer, grow, increase in wisdom, be tempted or even die, that all simplicity of thought upon the matter is at an end. Then men who do not take pleasure in solving intellectual problems, and who want some clear foundation for spiritual feeling, end at last in feeling towards Jesus in two plain fashions—either as if he were wholly a man, or as if he were wholly God. In the first instance they really believe what we believe, whether they stay or not in the Churches; in the second, they tend to lose sight of God the Father altogether, and to replace Him in their hearts by Jesus; or they worship, as they want them, two Gods. Many abide easily in conclusions of this second kind, but as many are at last driven to ask—Is all this really conceivable, or if conceivable, is it comforting? Then they are obliged to confess that they are in a maze, and have but little consolation in losing themselves therein.

Whereas, were the first conclusion true,—

were Jesus in all points a man, at one with God only as we can become at one with Him; and yet, being at one with our nature, had he conquered evil in and through our nature—that indeed would be an inspiration, an inexpressible comfort to think and to believe. If he were born as we are born, grew, lived, died and were born again into the higher world precisely as we are, in accordance with, and not in violation of the laws which regulate our being here; and if, as such, he yet lifted our nature into union with God the Father—why then, from how much that wearies the wings of our faith, and disturbs our reason, and distresses our religion, should we not be freed!

If it should also be true—that others (without, however, his spiritual genius which was as unique in its way as that of Homer or Shakspeare was in poetry) lived the same kind of holy and loving life as he lived; if he were not the solitary instance of a Revealer and a Saviour, but the representative of a thousand thousand other men who were also Revealers and Saviours on the same grounds and by the same means as his—why then, from what a host of mingled intellectual, spiritual, and moral

troubles we should be freed, and how frank and clear would be our reverence and love of him! The whole question is now actively discussed again, and I will try and place, with as much simplicity as possible, the view I hold of it before you. What was Jesus, and what relation does he bear to us?

The law of Revelation of which I have so often spoken—That God is through the ages communicating Himself in many ways and diverse manners to all men; and that He has never ceased to do so, slowly evolving the complete conception of Himself through every religion, among every people, in all the spheres of human thought and act—naturally contains within itself this other conclusion—that at certain times God's work in Man should exhibit itself in a specially heightened way in persons of special spiritual powers, of special spiritual influence; men of a divine genius for divine lives, who impel the whole world forward into a higher life of love and holiness and knowledge of God. And this, history tells us, has been actually the case. Almost every nation has had its mighty spirits of Love whose followers have been like the sands of the sea, whom men have

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loved so much that they have lifted them into an equality with God; who were not indeed divine in that fashion, but, on the contrary, extraordinarily human, and who represented to us, not what we could *not* become, but that which we all ought to become, and that which we all are destined to become.

Of all these prophets of spiritual truth, of all who have lived in holiness and love, we, who take the name of Christian, hold that Jesus is the greatest. He has told us most about all that Man should be, in his relation to God and his fellowmen. He has been most truly human. He lived the nearest to essential Love, and he, because he was so much the ideal man, was therefore the most at one with the Father. Love, which has shown itself in many other men in seed and shoot and stem, in branches and in leaves, came to the loveliest flower in the life of Jesus. But to even a lovelier flower than that life of love on earth, Humanity (having become all Christ), will hereafter come, not lovelier in spirit than Jesus, but lovelier in the shaping it will have, when pain and sorrow and wrong shall only be names of what has been.

This is no miraculous account of a supernatural event, nor of a development greater than we may justly expect of Humanity. This is nothing beyond nature; no more out of the question than the existence of Shakspeare or Newton is, when we look back to the savages from whence they came; no more impossible to conceive of the spiritual Humanity when we look forward, than the coming into being of a race whose intellectual and imaginative powers shall be as high as those of Newton or Shakspeare. The development that has been, ought to be increased in the future, and more widely dispersed. That conclusion stands to reason, and is founded on experience. Men believe in the possibility of such a development of the future intellect and imagination of men, because persons have already emerged so far above the common level as were Dante or Darwin or Beethoven. I believe the same with regard to the range of holiness, because persons have emerged so far above the ordinary level of the spiritual life as Jesus—as others too, of whom I hold that he was chief. And I hold that the future spiritual development of men into spiritual equality with Jesus is likely,

nay is sure to be more wide-spread than the future intellectual or imaginative development of men into equality with Newton or Shakspeare, because the capacity for love and for righteousness is far more, as experience shows, in the power of all men, than the capacities for abstruse thinking, or for imaginative creation. We shall all love as Jesus loved, and live as righteously as Jesus lived. Indeed this is the belief of St. Paul. It underlies all his writings. When we say then that the spiritual power of Love in man flowered in Jesus, and that this was natural and not supernatural—no more supernatural than the flowering of the imaginative power in an imperial poet—we make a claim for him which is entirely human, and which does not isolate him from us into the perfection which we attribute to Deity.

The next thing to say is—That if this perfectness of human love did not continue to produce itself, or if nothing equal to it ever again occurred; were it a lonely fact, were not other men to reach hereafter the same height of love—the appearance of Jesus might be called miraculous. It would be unique in the universe, it would be the absolutely divine in Humanity—



and such is indeed the assertion of the orthodox. But the very essence of our view of Jesus asserts the opposite to the orthodox view, and bases all the religious comfort which his life gives to us on that opposite view. It asserts that our Human Nature itself was shown in him to be able to receive, and spread like a spirit from itself, such a measure of pure love and holiness that men could scarcely believe it was other than the very love and holiness of God. It *was*, indeed, God's love and holiness, but communicated, not underived; such as man might have according to his nature; such as God intends that man shall possess in the process of his evolution. This possession of pure love and holiness by Jesus proclaims and is a guarantee of the truth that we shall one and all possess them also. What has been in him does not, and will not remain unique, as it would be were it supernatural; on the contrary, it will be the end, and is the normal end of all Humanity. It is within the laws which regulate the spiritual development of man. This is put in noble words in the Epistle to the Ephesians where the writer is borne on the double wings of lofty thought and emotion beyond the limitations of

the time in which he lived—‘Until we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the perfect Man—unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’ We are shown then, in the appearance of Jesus, *not* a miracle, *not* an interference with order—but the Law itself of our evolution, the true order of spiritual Humanity. And that is the chief revelation which the life of Jesus has made to us. It is not a supernatural revelation. It is one made, as all unveilings of truth are made, in the normal development of mankind; of which such exceptional lives as that of Jesus—exceptional in degree and not in kind, and no more exceptional in the spiritual sphere than the life of Shakspeare is in the sphere of art—are a natural part, a part, that is, of the history of our spiritual development which is not a matter of conjecture but of experience. They have been, and they will be again. It is a revelation which every loving and holy life makes to us; but which no life has as yet made more fully, more vividly than the life of Jesus; and it is a revelation of truths which concern man even more than they concern God. It tells us what man actually is—the Son of God. It tells

us that holiness, union with truth and justice, love which wholly loses self-desire, obedience to the highest will, are the natural in human nature, not the supernatural; are the normal qualities of the true soul of man. It reveals to us that sin and falsehood, injustice, hatred, and the following of our own selfish will, are abnormal and unnatural, and that to leave them behind us is not to get a new nature, but to return to our original nature.

That is the very reverse of the popular Theology, its downright contradiction. Once believed, it renders that Theology impossible, and all its scheme, and all the reasons on which it urges men to God. It removes from us the sense that we are naturally divided from God, and that we belong by right to another Being, and an evil Being. It replaces the miserable doubt we have when we are told that it needs a miracle to cure our nature of its innate evil, by the noble faith which urges us to be the true child of Him who is our nearest relation, our Father; who can never separate Himself from us because we are sharers of His very Being; and to unite with whom is not supernatural for us, but the most natural thing in the world. It blocks out that

theory of atonement, the root of which is that nothing but supernatural interference could reconcile God to us or us to God. It does away with all miraculous mediators, whether of a being equally divine and human, or of human beings like priests, endowed with miraculous powers to administer or make efficacious the means of grace. It destroys that anger we feel, and which keeps so many from their Father, when we are told that our human love and goodness are not good, but only splendid sins. It destroys the sense of absurdity we feel when we are told that our whole nature is so evil that it must be blotted out and a new one given to us, imputed to us even, before we are fit to approach our God. It redeems God Himself from the dreadful accusation that He made us to be naturally wicked, and that He cannot save even a few of us without an elaborate and miraculous scheme, in which He sets into difficult balance the attributes of His nature, and divides the conception we have of His personality. And, to leave many other things by, it renders useless all the complicated arguments about our relation to God and His to us, which are the fruitful source of endless doubts, and infinite trouble, and replaces them

by a restful simplicity of love such as a child may understand, and which a child does feel to its father. It is, indeed, a true good news, and a mighty deliverance.

Finally—and still keeping closely to this part of the subject—the faith itself that there have been those in our nature, of whom Jesus is the chief, who have, through its natural powers, realized in it God's glory of love and righteousness, and that we are also destined by God to realize this glory in another world, if not in this; this is an inspiring thing to believe, the very spring and power of a human life. Having this faith, we lift our eyes to that realized excellence and pursue it with the certainty of attaining it, the certainty which a child who loves his father has of becoming like his father. When we sin, we are ashamed of falling short of our true nature. When we do what is right, we rejoice in following the law of our nature. At every conquest of our false nature, we become more our real self, and, at the same time, more of God; and the result is an awful self-reverence, and a still more awful humility. The nearer we get to our true nature the nearer we get to God. The nearer we draw to God the more

his infinity of love reveals itself, and the deeper is our mingled joy and humbleness.

No failure overwhelms us—failure is a necessary element of our struggle. But in this faith of ours, we know that conquest is the end of failure. No sorrow or pain over-distresses us. Sorrow and pain must be part of the race we run, but beyond sorrow and pain, nay in them, we see the joy and blessedness which are certain to be wrought by all sacrifice of self.

In our secret life, which our most beloved on earth cannot see, we are ruled by the passionate motive of being worthy of the nature God has revealed in his chosen servants upon earth as ours, by the thought of Jesus and all his army. By this we are not only held back from wrong within, but urged to righteousness; to be white as the snow in thought, eager for truth as the sun is to run his course, rooted in justice as the mountains, grounded in love as Jesus was, and, through the whole of this hourly effort, abiding in God's eternal and unbroken love to us in childlike trust—always saying to ourselves, as our master was given grace to say, 'I am not alone, the Father is with me.' Yes, none can say how great, how steady, how beautiful,

how full of joy, ought to be the life of one who knows that the standard of the life of Jesus is by right his standard, and that he is certain to reach it in the end because he too is a son of man and a son of God.

## THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

### II.

**I** HAVE already contrasted the orthodox view of Jesus with that which is held by a free Christian body like our own. We believed that he was not God, that his appearance and life on the earth were not supernatural, but natural; that he was at all points, in birth, childhood, manhood, and death, like unto us; and that he differed from ordinary men and women not by nature but by spiritual genius, just as Shakspeare and Newton, in the imaginative and intellectual worlds, have differed from the common type. He was one of the elected souls whose words and life have moved the whole world forward, and continue to breathe into it inspiration.

Now in this natural human life of ours, Jesus attained to so great a love of man, and therefore to so great a love of the Father,



that it seemed to the men of the ancient Church, who lived in a world that did not love much, that he must be God. It was more than human, men thought, to love so much. Moreover, since a perfect love like this secures holiness of life, and indeed is itself holiness, men, astonished by this beauty of purity, declared that none but God could be so good, that Jesus could not be a man like us.

I allow the naturalness of this conclusion, provided that we grant the truth of the miraculous Incarnation; but if we cannot do this, if historical criticism has driven us to deny the miracle of the Incarnation, we are now driven to say that 'Jesus reached this excellence as a man, and by a man's powers; as a child of God, and in love and faith of God.' And our contention is that this view of him is not only the highest, but also the most spiritual, and the most full of consolation to mankind. For, if he did reach this in our very human nature, it is a plain disclosure to us that our nature is capable of reaching it, and that the qualities we love in him—holiness, justice, purity, and love—are natural to us, are our true nature; and that their opposites are the unnatural in us.

Now it follows, if that be true, that the whole of the popular theology, which is founded on the doctrine that we are naturally evil and apart from God, and therefore need an atonement made by one who is not of our nature only, is not in accordance with the truth of things. We are by nature children of God and His love, not children of wrath and the devil. When we do wrong, we sin against our true nature; when we do right, we return to it; and Jesus, and all who have loved and been good as he, were not as such divine, but men who had lived as men were made naturally and truly to live, and as we all shall come to live hereafter.

This is the reverse, as I said, of the popular theology, and contradicts, at every point, its main doctrines, and especially that body of them which has been called The Scheme of Salvation. It sounds like a cry in the wilderness to say these things, but there are many who say them, and their number increases day by day. It may be that before long they may be listened to in the market-places, and accepted by the host of religious men. But at present, there is against them not only the long traditions of 1800 years, since the teaching of Jesus was first perverted by

the intellect for the sake of selfishness in the world, but the vast organisations of the Roman, the Greek, and the English Churches, and the vast array of almost every sect of Protestant believers, all of whom, with diverse differences, maintain the main outlines of the scheme of doctrine which is founded on that vital separation between man and God which necessitated that any Saviour should be of a different nature from ours, and in that different nature should reconcile us to God, or God to us.

Well, huge as the army of opposition is, it is now disbanding, and its doctrine is thinning out with it. Every ten years sees something of it dissolved away. When it is really gone, men will at last perceive that it was a fond thing vainly invented, and cast about for the truth. And there the truth will stand, lovely and ready for their embrace—the truth as it is in Jesus—That every man is a Son of God and Son of Man, and that he may become on earth, and of his own nature, filled and inspired with his Father's Spirit, and as full of love as Jesus. And this he certainly will become, if not here, then hereafter.

I pass on now to another aspect of the main question. I have said that of all men of whom

we know, Jesus reached the highest spiritual point of Love to man and God, and therefore of goodness, and this is scarcely controverted by any body of believers, or unbelievers. A few, envious or jealous of his pre-eminence, or angry with him on account of the doctrines foisted upon his name, try to decry him, to find out that he is not better than any of us ; but their efforts recoil on their own head. The judgment of the Court of Humanity has been passed upon his life, and it is—That he is the first of men because he is the first in Love, and because the first in love, the first in goodness.

How then—this is now the question—how did he reach that pre-eminence ? The answer we must give is plain, 'He reached it as a man, and naturally;' but it is necessary to contrast this with the opposite view in order to understand it better.

The miraculous view of Jesus says that he did not grow into holiness and perfect love, both of which in absolute fulness they impute to him, but that he was, and from the beginning, always of the same absolute perfection in them. He was, in his human nature, supernaturally divided from the ordinary tendency to fall into wrong-thinking and wrong-doing. Being united as to his human nature with an absolute Divine

Nature, so that he was God Himself on earth, it was impossible for him to sin, even in thought. As such he could not have felt the pressure of any temptation to sin upon his Will. There could be no struggle.

He might share—it is plain he did—in our sufferings, pains, sorrows, and death (though that too, on the hypothesis, seems strange); for in these there is no necessary sinfulness, but he certainly could not take part in our battle against false and evil feelings, or against extremes of sense or passion. He could not feel our yearning to God for forgiveness, or our hunger and thirst for God, for he was himself God. He could not share with us in those secret hours when conscience fights her hardest battle, when in the agony of temptation we are utterly alone with God and our own evil, at some crisis in our lives; nor in those weaknesses of trial when the Father is hidden from us or unknown. These are hours which Godhead in Manhood, however self-limited, utterly excludes, and the Godhead in Jesus divides him from our most agonising, and most victorious experiences; from sympathy, that is, as a man, with the very deepest things in human life. Of course, this

difficulty has been felt, and a multitude of desperate and subtle explanations, in which the intellectual power has been strained to the last strand of its rope, have been brought forward to explain how the humanity could be independent of the divinity; but the explanations contradict one another, and they are only excellent intellectual fencing. On the whole, it is plain that the doctrine that Jesus was God and Man asserts that he did not reach the spiritual flower of humanity through any strife whatever with evil. He *was* that perfect flower from his birth. There was no growth in goodness or love, no development of spiritual character; no likeness then to us, as we slowly fight our way to righteousness and love.

On the other hand, if Jesus reached this excellence of love as a man, it is no miracle, no supernatural thing which we witness, but a thing possible to every man. All men are able to reach it and will reach it, if there be a progressive life to come. We shall be as Jesus was; and indeed that is the view taken in the *Epistles* of believers in Christ. There, and at that time, this possibility was limited to a few. Now, at this time in the world's history,

we universalize that view. What S. Paul held to be true of a few, we hold to be true of all; and this universalizing of limited Apostolic views, this development of Christian Doctrine, is the new Revelation given to us, the unfolding of the main truths of Jesus. We hold then that the excellence of Love and Goodness which Jesus reached is not miraculous, not outside of Law. This is, on the contrary, the law—That human nature is, without exception, in every man, to reach the excellence of Jesus; and to reach it, as he reached it, in accordance with order, in the way all experience teaches us that men and women have always grown towards its goal.

It is in our daily knowledge that all goodness, all power of loving beyond self, are only attained by us through struggle against evil and weakness and selfish desires; by passing through trials and by conquering temptations; by suffering for the sake of others, making our life a martyrdom for duty, truth, and love of man. If Jesus, being a man like us, were to attain to the love and holiness he did attain, he would have to do it in that way, and if he did it in that way, he did it not outside the constant order of things, but within that order.

Now the testimony of the *Gospels*, of the recognized sayings of Jesus himself, of the *Epistles*, is that there was this struggle in Jesus, and that he was made perfect by his action in passing through it. He won his victory as a man, and in the ordinary human fashion; and this victory shows us that in our nature we may also conquer. 'As the master is,' said Jesus himself, 'so shall the servants be.' So then, all that he did has a real, not a fictitious value for us. Our temptations were an actual, not a scenical ordeal to him. The tasks of our humanity which God sets us to do were fulfilled by him with human, not with superhuman powers. He fought his way, not with the overwhelming weapons of an archangel, nor with the unconsciousness of a god, but with the will of a man which threw itself into the will of God. The strength he sought he did not seek for in himself, but as we must do, outside of himself, in the Father. The suffering he had was the suffering of a man, rendered more and more sensitive to the sufferings of others in proportion as his power of loving grew. The sympathy with man, and the power he had over men through love, were wholly human, and wholly natural.



It was a human conquest, that is, a conquest made by a man, in dependence on God the Father; and, as such, it is a revelation of our capability to be victorious in God, of the union with God in which our battle is to close. When we look upon the life of our master, we see disclosed to us the necessity, the powers, the supports of our struggle with inward and outward evil; its motives, its inspiration, its true conduct, and its end. And this is a part of the revelation he gave—not a supernatural, but a natural one—the same kind of revelation which every just and loving man and woman makes to the society in which they live.

This, then, is our view of the way in which Jesus reached his Mastership in Love of God and man, and therefore in goodness. There are many corollaries to attach to this conclusion, but there is only one on which I wish to speak to-day. It has to do with practical conduct. We are urged to follow Christ and to be like him. But when we think of him as God, and as being holy and loving, just because he was divine, we say, 'We never can be like him; this love and goodness of his are not in our power as weak and erring mén. It is no use trying to be what he was,

for we are not one with Deity,'—and the result of this common thinking is, in the case of thousands, despair, or indignation, or indifference.

On another side, there are those who believe that though they cannot be like Jesus by their own power, they can be made like him by having all he did imputed to them. They are made righteous and loving from without by a supernatural power; and belief in that has done indeed a vast deal for many men and women, and, through the love it has awakened, has wrought them into holiness, into oneness with the spirit of Jesus. I am the last person to deny these results, but it is not the doctrine which has produced them. It is the love which has grown up in their hearts for Jesus as the lover of God and the lover of men; and the love is rather injured than developed by the doctrine. We see only too plainly how this doctrine acts on those who believe it, but do not love. It makes them indifferent and careless, neglectors of the duties of love and goodness. 'All has been done for me,' they say, 'I can do nothing myself. My sins have been borne by Jesus; the anguish of love I ought to suffer for others, the great penalty I ought to endure for

myself is on his shoulders. I will leave it there. His righteousness is mine. I need not trouble to strive for goodness. I need not think of it, nor fight its battle.' 'Nay,' some might say, 'since he took all the thorns and Cross for me, I may dance and play in life, and leave aside love of my fellow-men. I am saved; why should I trouble to save others.' It is a common result of this view of Jesus; and in a lazy, luxurious, and selfish world, it is sure to increase and multiply.

But the practical result on conduct of the view I have laid before you is quite different. What Jesus has done as a man, we can do as men, and we are bound to do it in his spirit. It is not impossible for us, nay it is certain that we can do it as men, with the spirit of our Father in us, as Jesus did it. Since one of us has lived so perfectly, we are bound to live up to that ideal, and never to be faithless in our effort to equal it. It will be no supernatural effort, and if we attain it, it will not be a miracle. The right and natural goal of our human nature is to be all-loving and all-good. And we must never think that it is done to us, or given to us from without, or won without our own effort, or dependent on faith alone. There is not a day or

hour in which our whole soul ought not to be given to it; there is not a moment in which all the duties of that life of Christ are not laid on us to perform. There is no effort or action of his love which is not also demanded of us by God. We are to be, in our own persons, all that Jesus was before God and before man. If we do not strive for this, we are not his followers, not Christians. In fact, this was his own view. 'Love one another *as* I have loved you'—all that I have said is contained in that. We are to be what he was, and we can be what he was. O what a demand! and, at the same time, what an inspiration! What a clearance of conduct, what a dissipation of false excuses for not pursuing his life, is contained in this view of what Jesus was, and of what we are to be! What an overthrow of the view of despair that we can never equal him, and therefore that there is no use to try! What a destruction of the view that all has been done for us, and therefore that we need do nothing! We can become as loving as Jesus, and as good, and we are bound by every call of God and man, never to rest till we have attained his love and his goodness—the natural end of man.

## THE LOVE WE BEAR TO JESUS.

### I.

**I**N the last two sermons the view is maintained that Jesus was in all points a man, nothing more either in nature or in person than a man. The height of love he reached, he reached as one of us ; he was born, lived, died, and re-lived in the spirit, in no other fashion than we ; was inspired of God as we are inspired, righteous as we can be righteous, tempted as we are, and fought the same battle with the same weapons. What difference there is between us and him is a difference in degree and not in kind. The difference is very great, but it is not greater than that between Shakspeare and a minor poet in the realm of poetry, or between Newton and one of us in the realm of pure thought. If then this height of love and holiness reached by our

Master was attained in our nature; and if we can attain it, and hereafter shall attain it, we must no longer conceive our Nature as naturally evil, but as naturally good; we can no longer think of it as destined to ruin unless a miracle intervene, but as destined, in the ordinary course of progress, to perfect union with God. This—which is the direct contradiction of all the orthodox Theology—is the true good news of Jesus, a disclosure of the truth concerning man. Man is not the natural child of evil; he is the legitimate child of God the Father, and the life of Jesus proves it when we confess that he was a man alone. And now, having this conception of Jesus as one of ourselves, but as the highest, the most loving and the holiest of the prophets; as our most human Brother—of what kind is the honour and love we give to him?

It is the habit to accuse us of having little love for Jesus; of a religion which is therefore cold and unimpassioned; of losing the most powerful emotions of the soul; and the ground of the accusation is, that if Jesus be not God, we cannot love him with all our hearts.

Why? I see no reason why we should not. I see no reason why I should not say of him

almost all that St. Paul says : why I should not keep him as my daily companion in my heart, why I should not trust him as my master, why I should not believe in his teaching as giving me the keys to the problems of life and death, why I should not follow his call in life, why I should not die for his ideas, and why, out of this reverence and long obedience, and trust and faith and gratitude, there should not spring up and grow into me a love for him greater and diviner than I can give to any other of the great sons of men—a love dearer and nearer and more vital than I give to anyone on earth, even to those whom the passions of earth knit closest to the soul.

There have been many other loving and holy men for whom we hold profound affection, whose voices speak to us continually, whose words make our heart full, by whose thoughts our life is enriched and our heart enlarged, and whom having not seen, we love with joy unspeakable, and full of glory—but the love a man may give to Jesus is the deepest of all, and I think the main reason of that is, that he loved the most, and the most widely. I cannot trace in any of the other prophets and poets of man the same

universality; the same absence of national, social, or domestic prejudice; the same freedom from the world and the things of the world; the same freedom from the ascetic and the things of the ascetic; from the intolerance of ecclesiasticism, of privilege, of wealth, of rank, of colour, of social maxims; from the Philistine and all his ways. Man was loved by him as universal man; and each man was loved for himself alone. The whole of human life, all its problems, all its laws, all its individual act and thought, was reduced to one thing. There was but one duty, nay, one joy, in which all life was contained—'Love one another as I have loved you,' that is, 'love them as children of God.' There is nothing so universal and yet so simple as that final synthesis, so infinite in its application, and yet so absolutely one—like a great idea of Nature such as the theory of gravitation—in the life or the teaching of any other prophet. It stands alone in its comprehensive power. There is nothing but Love which can be felt with the same eagerness and joy by everyone, poor or rich, high or low, learned or unlearned, old or young.

That is the main reason why Jesus has been



loved more than any man that ever lived, and why we, who have never seen him, can, and do love him more than anyone whom we have seen.

Moreover, the love we have for those we see is often so mixed up with our desire to keep their love for us altogether for ourselves, with jealousies and claims and taking offence, with all the feelings which the self in love encourages—that it is often more of a torment than a joy. This is necessarily not the case with our love of those whom we have not seen, whom we enshrine in the whitest chamber in our hearts, into the sacred recesses of which the selfishness of passion cannot enter. The love we have for Jesus as the highest of them, is not for any selfish reason, not for anything he has done for us and for no one else, not because he has selected us alone—but because he has loved all as much as he loved us, because we are freed, in our love for him, from all possibility of jealousy, of any selfish claim whatever. We love Love itself in him. And it is an infinite mercy and consolation when we are wearied with the claims and the worrying of our own love for those we see and know—to

turn from the stormy world within us, where self is in every gust, to the peaceful world where we abide in the love of those who ask us to love them for the sake alone of the beauty of loving. 'Thou lovest all;' we say, 'all equally, and for that I chiefly love thee, and in this my love have peace.'

There are, however, selfish reasons given for loving Jesus. We are told that we love him because he has saved us from the punishment of our sins by taking it upon himself.

That is not our reason for loving him. We do not believe that he took our punishment upon himself, and we do not believe that he saves us from that punishment. The punishment, as men call it, of sin is the direct and awful fruit of sin. Its seed is in itself; and we make it ourselves out of the tree we have planted within. Punishment cannot be taken away by another, and we cannot be saved from it by another. We must eat the fruits of sin. But when we learn from Jesus—as we do learn—that God loves us through all our sin; that He is sorry for our wrong-doing; that He is sorry for the bitterness and pain we suffer in consequence of our wrong; that though He

cannot free us at once from that bitterness, it is not arbitrarily inflicted but is the result of an everduring law—we see punishment in a different light, and it becomes the impulse to good. Our anger with God, which is the worst part of our pain, passes away. We know that we are loved, and we smile with pleasure in the midst of punishment. ‘I will arise,’ we cry, ‘and go to my Father.’ Punishment is according to law, and, being by law, it cannot mean the personal anger of God. It is, on the contrary, coincident with Love which cries—‘Put yourself on the side of Law. Plant trees of good, and you will eat good fruits.’

That is the conviction which Jesus has given to us, and for that we love him; nor is there one grain of self in such a love. And when we learn from him—as we do learn—that if we love God and man as he did, we shall inevitably do what is righteous, and naturally eat the fruits of righteousness which are blessing and joy and peace within, we know that we have only to cease doing wrong in order to naturally cease to eat those fruits of wrong which are punishment, are sorrow and restlessness and pain. When that change is wrought, then we have

passed through our punishment, but we have suffered it. It has not been taken away. We have eaten the fruits of our wrong-doing. What we have sown, that very thing we have reaped, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some a hundred. We suffer from this reproductiveness of sin, and then, when we are convinced of our state of soul, we suffer still more. The punishment is inward, but it is terrible retribution. Moreover there is also the suffering which accompanies the uprooting of the harvest of sin, the burning of the tares, the painful ploughing of the ground of the heart, the eradication of the weeds, the long, difficult process of growing the good seed. There is enough of suffering to satisfy the most rigid moralist. But there is also in this part of the punishment a growing happiness. We know that during the process we are loved by God, that all our pain is remedial, that there is an absolute certainty of a harvest of good. As surely as hate doubled hate, so love will reduplicate love. As surely as impurity increased from impurity, so surely will righteousness increase from righteousness. What we sow now we shall also reap. That which men call reward is in reality necessary

fruit. When we change our sowing, we inevitably change our reaping.

It was Jesus who best told us that we could do this. 'Change your heart, and all things are changed.' And then he reduced the means of working this change to an absolute simplicity. There is only one thing needful. It is to love God and Man to the forgetfulness of self. Love your Father, and you will do what is like His character. Love your brother-men, and you will do all that is right and pure and true. All the law demands, all the prophets require, are fulfilled when you love. And when you love, you are freed from those fruits of sin which men call punishment, and you produce the fruits of love which men call reward.

The love we give our Master for filling us with that master-truth of life is not a selfish love. The truth saves us, but it saves us by destroying self within us.

Then, there are other reasons given why we should love Jesus, which are founded on the miraculous account given of his 'Person.' He was God, we are told, and he gave up all for us, left his heavenly world and became obedient unto death as man while he was also

God; suffering our punishment as man, but redeeming us by a Divine power. For this mighty sacrifice of his pleasure as God we are supposed to love him. But this is all mythical, and the love we bear our Master is not founded on a supposed sacrifice of that kind, which, if he had been the very God, would have been a very easy matter to him. We love him as a man who gave up his whole life for his fellow-men; who surrendered power and wealth and worldly honour and the applause of men to live the life of love among the poor and outcast—himself poor, himself outcast from society; who stood firm, because he loved the oppressed, against those who did not love them but scorned them; who gave to the lost and the enslaved and the down-trodden immortal hopes and immortal joy, and filled their misery with peace, and their degradation with triumph; who died a felon's death rather than be false to his mission; who bore an agony of sorrow that he might leave unstained and beautiful to men the spiritual truths which are the life of the world. This is what he did, and he did it as one of ourselves, for our sake, in love of us, in hope that we should do the same; saving men by the power

of our love as he saved men ; and living in the lives of others as he lived and lives in us. This is the ground of our love of him, the same ground on which we base our love of a thousand others who have wrought the work of love in the same manner. Only I know of none who have done this with the same completeness, with so passionate an affection, with so much commonsense, and yet with so much inspiration. And I know of none whose truths are so wide-reaching, so deep-piercing, so universal and so simple, so free from the limits which the world, ecclesiastical or social, and the intellect, working at definitions in its vain and pitiful fashion, have the impertinence to lay down for the acceptance of the spirit of man. There is none like him, none—in this—to us ; and the love we feel to him, our elder Brother, our Captain, and our Master, is not to be compared, in depth and tenderness and emotion, to any other love.

This is a personal love, it is true, and it is given for reasons which are partly personal. We feel that we are loved of him. But if that were only a love founded on personal reasons, it might end in selfishness, in our isolating our-

selves with him, apart from other men. And in some cases such religious isolation does arise. But the personal reasons for our love are little in comparison with those which are not personal. The chief reason for our love is that Jesus loved *all* the world of men,—believed that all were his Father's children, pitied all, and spent his whole life to heal the hearts of all. We love him most because he did not limit his love, because he did not isolate it on us, because he embraced the world. When we think of that, we lose our self. We also seem not to care so much whether he love us personally or not, provided he loves all. It is then that we touch a higher love than that merely personal love we give to sweetheart or husband, wife or child or friend. And still further, we not only love Jesus for the universal love he felt and acted, but we love the love we give him, because of its nobleness and beauty. To love, and love the love we give—that is a great perfection in love.

Again—this love, given to one of ourselves, is easy to understand and feel. It does not travel out of our common experience. We need not be chary of feeling it, nor afraid to



feel it, lest we should interfere with the love we owe to God, our Father. Our love to God is simple. It is given to a Father, to the All-wise, the All-righteous, the Source of truth and love. It is that of a child, full of reverence, full of trust, full of imaginative awe and love. It stands alone—there is nothing like it. But our love for Jesus does not stand alone; it is the same in kind as that we feel for other men; its difference, if it have a difference, as I have said it has, is a difference in degree, and that difference is founded on our conviction that his love for man is the greatest that has ever been. It is given to a Brother, to one whose power over the heart, whose wisdom, whose holiness, whose truth and love were not essentially inherent in himself, but breathed into him and wrought in him by God his Father in the same way in which our power, wisdom, and righteousness are breathed into us and wrought in us. Our love to him then is not complex, not confused by doctrines of his divine nature. It is in kind the simple and natural love which men feel to another man. And we have thousands of instances of the same kind of love in the history of man and

of our own experience. There is scarcely one of us who has not had our hero in the past on whose life and character our own life and character have been formed. How much we have loved these in the silence of the heart, none can tell. There is scarcely one of us who has not known, and often not personally, some one in the present whose life and work have made us new men and women, recreated life for us, impelled, exalted, comforted us from day to day. How much we love these saviours and sanctifiers of our being—no one knows but ourselves. It is that human, natural love which we feel for Jesus.

Lastly. Someone may say that the love of which I speak wants personal reality. Jesus is dead, and we cannot love the dead in this vital way. We need, for love, to realise a personal communion. That which we feel for the dead is a sacred memory—a retrospective feeling of gratitude, not love. Our feeling for our own dead, for the heroes we admire, for Jesus himself is dimmed by the mists of centuries. It is tender, but it is thin.

Yes, that is so, if the dead be really dead. But we owe it to Jesus most of all that we do

not believe them to be actually dead at all, but as much alive, nay more vividly alive, than we are ourselves. When I stood on the beach at Lerici, and saw the blue sea where Shelley died, it never occurred to me for one moment that he was not alive. When I walked alone in the pine forest of Ravenna, no one could have persuaded me that Dante who had walked on earth where I was walking then, was not living and thinking and loving then as vividly as myself. When I visit Grasmere, Wordsworth is as much alive to me as if he held me by the arm and looked me in the face. And it is even more incredible to me that Jesus is dead. He thinks and loves and acts now, at this moment, and is as much at work as he was in Palestine, nearly two thousand years ago. If life be required for love, we can love those whom we call dead as much as we love our wife and child and friend, whose hands we clasp to-day. This faith of ours secures the actuality of love. It is felt by the living, it is given to the living.

## THE LOVE WE BEAR TO JESUS.

### II.

THE subject of my last sermon was the love we bore to Jesus, of what kind it was, and how far it extended. I said it was a human love; that is, it was given to a man and not to a God. The reasons for it were natural and not supernatural. Its greatness, its depth was in proportion to the depth and fulness of his humanity. We love him more than other men because he loved more than other men; because his love was more universal, more freed from prejudices of nation, of class, of the world or of churches, than that of other prophets and lovers of mankind; because it was, while fully personal to his friends, yet freed from that form of personal love which deviates into selfishness; because it went beyond the love of home and

friends and nation into love for all men, and showed that love chiefly in the devotion of his whole being, even to death on the Cross, for the truths which he conceived to be absolutely necessary for the spiritual progress of the race. And above all we loved him as the prophet who revealed the true nature of man, the true life of man, and man's true relation to God and Humanity.

This is a human and natural love, and it is of the same kind which we give to all men who have loved and worked for the race. It differs only in degree, and not in kind from that which we give to other men. Moreover, this kind of love is deeper and more abiding than any merely personal love, such as we give to our mother, our husband, wife, children, sweetheart, or friend. It lives beyond the range of jealousies and claims, of taking offence, of personal desires, and of the self-invented troubles which stain, or touch with decay, or wither altogether, the flower of pure and perfect love. Finally, I spoke of the objection that this love on which I dwelt wanted personal reality, because Jesus was dead, and love was only truly given to the living. On this I only touched for a moment. It is now the subject of this sermon.

The answer Jesus himself gave to that was that those whom we call dead were as alive as we are. 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him.' Abraham, Isaac, Jacob were, Jesus declared, centuries after these patriarchs had died, alive, thinking, loving, acting in the invisible kingdom; and he himself, when he was dead, would rise again into a new life, would go on thinking for men, loving his friends and all mankind, and working for the same truths for which he worked on earth. This was his belief before his death, and this was what he impressed as I believe, from the spiritual world, upon the spiritual consciousness of those who loved him. I do not think that the Apostles heard with the outward ear the words of my text, but I am convinced that Jesus has smitten into the hearts, not only of the Apostles, but of millions of men and women, the message of these words, 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' And on this conviction of the continued life and work of those whom we call dead—that is, on the conviction of their resurrection—is built up our faith in the communion of the dead with the living. Our love then for our master is supported by his daily

presence with us. Spirit to spirit, ghost to ghost, he loves and works with us. This is the last phase of what I have to say about my subject, and it needs expansion.

The first thing to speak of is what we call the spiritual world. All those who have died on earth and whose bodies have resolved again into the elements as the body of Jesus did, are, like Jesus, alive now, and thinking, feeling, and acting. How they live and where they live and what they do—of these things we know nothing. 'It doth not yet appear *what* we shall be.' We do not know either—in the way we know matters on earth—that they are even alive. But we believe in that, and live in our belief of it as Jesus and his followers did; as many other wise men did who never heard of Jesus. And the way in which we believe in it is governed by another faith of ours—by our faith that God, the source and giver of Life, is our Father, and loves us in the same way as a wise and tender father here loves his child. What the living-dead can do and cannot do, is to be judged by what we know a good and kindly father on the earth would permit his children to do.

The world, then, beyond our ken is peopled with those who have risen from the dead, that is, with all the souls who have thought and loved on earth. Not one is missing, not one has lost the powers of thought and love and will. All we have known and loved on earth, whose eyes we closed, and whom we mourned, are there, alive in God, each at his work, each, saint or sinner, moving upwards in orderly development.

If one may judge from the ceremonies with which death is here celebrated, from the way it is here spoken of, from the hopeless grief of those who are bereaved, from the way in which the sorrow of loss, at first natural and necessary, is nursed and supported for many years—as if the dead were for ever dead, and not living in joy and peace; or if they have died stained with evil, as if they were not living in a state of remedial repentance—if we may judge from these matters, there is nothing so vitally disbelieved as the resurrection of the dead, or the existence of a world of living men and women beyond the grave. It is not only the sceptic who doubts it, but men and women who call themselves Christian act and talk about their dead, as if such a living world had no



existence. I think that this partly arises, among those who believe in a God, from the abominable doctrines, of the world to come, which persons desiring power over the thoughts and lives of men have invented, using the images and colours of paganism ; partly from that false and unloving conception of God which avers that a great number of the dead are divided for ever from His love ; and partly from the amazing view, founded also on heathen conceptions of Deity, that God condemns to eternal absence from Himself those who hold untrue opinions concerning His nature. Men think then, that their dead, if they continue to live, may be living in hopeless torture, or in torture with a ray of hope ; or at least they are in doubt as to their fate. No one can tell what has become of the poor souls. Joy, therefore, when the orthodox Christian thinks of his dead, is impossible, except in a few cases where a religious triumph has been plainly seen on the dying bed. It is sorrowful to think of the dreadful shadow which religious men, with their hell and purgatory, and their portrait of God as a Jailor or a merciless Tyrant to the sinful dead, has thrown over the whole Christian world ; and

has thrown over it because they would not receive, in its fulness, the faith that God was a Father.

But when one has fully felt that the essential direction of God's will to us is that of Fatherhood, and that our death makes no change whatever in that goodwill of His,—then the belief that all the dead are alive in Him ought to be a constant fountain of joy in our hearts; and our thought of those we have lost, when once the grief of parting has had its natural way, ought to be a thought of constant and quiet happiness. Our dead are with the undying Love, and moving on in Him. Our business is to mourn them no more, but to love them as if we saw them, and to live for them and with them in spirit, and to wait in work for the hour when they will welcome us into re-united life. This is part of our faith.

Then comes a further inference—an inference of faith in the love of God. If they are alive, they will be certain to wish to be near us, to speak to us in their manner, to help us, to comfort us, to be with us always, even to the end of the world. And whether they can or not, will depend on the will of our Father and their Father. Will it be good for

them, good for us, good for the whole that their living spirit should be with ours—that is the question; and we may be sure that God loves love, and will be kind to love, and will support natural ties. A father on earth would not keep his children apart. Nor will the Father in Heaven keep those who love one another apart, except for such reasons as our love itself would accept with gladness. I believe, then, that the dead are in constant communion with us, that in hours of trouble and of joy, of difficulty and crisis, of silent prayer and praise, their soul is touching ours, their influence pervades our being. A thousand thoughts we think uncaused are caused by them, a thousand tears are dried by impulses that they give, a thousand happy hours in lonely Nature and in the quiet night are made for us by them. Their love and their power are always with us.

Such a belief, firmly rooted, should have an immense and vital influence over daily life. The presence of the beloved and honoured dead—unseen, unheard, but actual, heart touching heart, conscience conscience, intellect intellect, spirit spirit,—what a guard, what a warning, what an impulse, what a comfort, what a secret pleasure!

How deep, in such a conviction, grows our personal love of those who are in the world to come—a love the very conditions of which frees it from the possibility of selfishness! How strongly then noble personality is educated in us—how vital is the persuasion of our immortality, how noble our conception of its kind! Then, as we feel the living presence of the dead and realize their life with us, we realize also the mighty world of living souls beyond this earth, and see in vision that vast and glorious society into which we shall soon enter with rejoicing. We look forward to a quick and exciting world, full of interest, full of endless communion with all the noble dead.

This is the communion with the dead, and we need no 'spiritualism,' nor its halting supernaturalism, to convince us of it. All those signs and wonders lower the note of noble faith, and end by weakening faith altogether. Rest on the truth that God is Love and Life—that all the dead are alive in Him, and that He will act, in the matter of their communion with us, as a loving father would act on earth. Every material manifestation is outside this spiritual interpretation. 'Their living soul is flashed on mine.' This is

enough and more than enough. It stands to reason, however, that this communion is subject to law, that is, to the idea which a God of righteousness and love has concerning its exercise. We know not what that law may be, but it is a reasonable conjecture that the power the dead have of communion with us should be given to them in proportion to their holiness and their love, that is, in proportion to their power for noble and spiritual use to those on earth. The holiest can best kindle into holiness, assist in temptation, strengthen in hours of battle. The most loving can comfort best, can best support the weak, deliver the captives of self, bind up the broken hearted. In that high world, then, as in this, there are those whose business is more with us than others, whose power and presence are with a greater number of the sons of men than those of others are. Those likest the Father in character are nearest to the children of the Father upon earth.

And now, in conclusion, I apply all these considerations to the love which we may bear to our Master Jesus. He died like other men; he rose again, not his body out of its grave, but his personal self out of the momentary

unconsciousness of death, into vivid and conscious life in the spiritual world. And in that life, he, like other men, has power to be in communion, thought on thought, heart to heart, spirit with spirit, with those he loved and knew on earth. He himself believed, while yet on earth, that he would have that power. The apostles, and all who loved him, believed also that he had it. They felt him moving, living, speaking in their hearts. His life was wedded to theirs and theirs to his. In this faith they lived, and in this faith they died ; and the result of it was a passionate, personal, but spiritual love which breathes through every line of the Epistles.

But remember, for this is necessary for my whole argument, that neither Jesus nor his Apostles believed that Jesus alone had this power. It was not a power isolated in Deity. It belonged also to other men. It was a power lodged in human nature beyond this world. As the Master was, so were the servants. The life Jesus was to live beyond this earth was the same in kind as those who preceded him and who followed him were also to live. If the Apostles thought that he was with them, they also thought that the other dead were with them

also. Even when the Apostles had gone, it was the belief of the early Church that all the faithful were also present with them, to feel with them, to love and comfort them. This power of Jesus to be in communion with us was not the power of a God, but of a man—a power delegated to human nature, to other men as well as to him, and exercised not miraculously, but according to God's law. For the law of which I have spoken as reasonable comes now into our argument—That the extent and efficacy of this power of communion is given in proportion to the holiness and love of the person exercising it. And it is plain that the Apostles, and chiefly S. Paul, believed that Jesus had this power in greater degree and efficacy than any other of those beyond the grave. And the representation of Jesus given in the fourth Gospel shows how that belief developed theologically in the Church of the second century, and developed into a theory of the person of Jesus which we cannot now altogether accept.

It is enough to say, if we believe that Jesus attained and conceived and wrought into a life a more universal love of man than any other of whom we have heard—that then

his power to be with us, to live in personal spiritual communion with us, will be the greatest, the most universal, the most comforting, and the most love-kindling. And it is in that way that we have the right to feel him as the living human spirit in our souls. As God is Divinity within us, so Jesus is Humanity in us, Humanity at its highest power of personal love. We have not only, then, God with us. We have also with us, and acting on us, all those we have known and loved on earth who are able to do us good. We have not only these, but also all the noble and sacred souls of men and women who now inhabit the wider and wiser world. We have not only all this cloud of faithful witnesses to truth and tenderness, but also, and I believe in a deeper communion than the rest, even than our most beloved friends, the Man of men, the most human soul who has lived on earth, the greatest lover of mankind, our Master, the Man Christ Jesus. And when we live, while yet on earth, in the world of the spirit, we live with him in the closest union possible between one human spirit and another. It is the actual pressure and love of a human soul within us that we feel, of the perfect man upon imperfect men. Nothing can



be nearer, more homelike, sweeter to the heart than this, save only the love of God Himself. We have both—the Divine and the Human, and it is well for us, weak creatures, that God gives us both—His own love and the love of His most loving child. For, often, we need the human to help us to the divine. We need one with us who has suffered like us, but who overcame suffering; one who has walked on our tormented path, but from the records of whose victory we take a daily courage. We need one who will speak to us with a human voice, and say, 'I am with you, my brother,' when we cannot as yet realize our Father in all His fulness. Yes, when we are overwhelmed by the passions which by their beauty or their horror lead us over the mountains till we are lost, we see the human eyes of Jesus look into ours, and his voice cry to us, 'Arise and go to the Father—come with me.' When the world calls us to ease and outward show and wealth, if we will but palter with truth or betray our conscience, it is Jesus who comes out of the wilderness to our side, and low and tender is the voice with which he says, 'Better the desert with God, than a palace with the tempter. Cry with me, "I will worship the Lord my God, and Him

only will I serve." When we are left quite alone in life, or in the midst of one of those struggles within when all the forces of heaven and hell seem to meet together; when in the deepest loneliness we bid farewell to earth, and look into the inexperienced land it is comfort to know that Jesus is by our side, that in these dread hours we have a human friend beyond this world, who takes our hand and encourages us—"O say," he cries, "with me in this trouble like to mine: "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Out of such communion grows love so deep that it can never die.

THE END.



## BOOKS ABOUT JESUS.

**Jesus Brought Back. A Study.** By JOSEPH HENRY CROOKER.  
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